



The Honorable Marvin L. Abney  
Chair, House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

May 14, 2026

**RE: Support for H7324 – A \$500,000 Appropriation to Sojourner House**

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Shannon McDonnell, and I'm the Communications Manager at Sojourner House. I'm writing today in strong support of House Bill 7324. I am not a clinician or a case manager but I am an advocate. It's my job to educate our community about the needs of our clients— all survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking— and to help them understand the day-to-day reality of our work.

I love talking about the good days. The days where someone comes in looking for help and we're able to provide them with the care they desperately need. Last Wednesday was one of those days. I was working at our drop-in center when a mother and two small kids came in looking for safety. The mom had packed all of their belongings in two small duffle bags. One of our advocates, Ed, sat with her for hours to figure out a pathway forward and was able to get the family placed in one of our crisis units. While they waited for their Uber to arrive the two little girls sat on the floor with our paralegal, Paty, eating cookies and drawing pictures of the stained glass windows on the front door of the building. It was a tough day, a long day— both Paty and Ed stayed until 8pm to make sure the family had everything they needed— but it was a good day because we knew when they left our office they were going somewhere safe.

Most of the time though, we don't get that assurance.

In 2025, our hotline calls went up 125% and as a result, we were only able to provide 11% of the people who called looking for shelter with safety on the night they called.

89% of people who came to us looking for help were told that our beds were full and there was a waitlist for housing with more than 100 families on it.

I did a community outreach event a few weeks ago and ran into a client who's been staying in one of our housing programs for about a year. She told me that she called our hotline every day for two months before she was finally rescued, and that she's so thankful to be safe.

That broke my heart. It shouldn't be that hard. Rhode Islanders in crisis shouldn't be forced to wait for life-saving care.

Stories like that are why this \$500,000 allocation matters so much. This is not just a number in a budget. It means more shelter beds, more stable apartments, and more chances for survivors and their children to move out of crisis and into safety.

Without more housing resources, survivors are often being asked to do the impossible: leave abuse without having a safe place to go. And when that happens, the consequences ripple outward — for children, for families, and for the emergency systems that are already stretched thin.

On behalf of the survivors whose stories we are entrusted to carry, and the staff who stand beside them every day, I urge you to support this \$500,000 allocation for Sojourner House. Help make sure that when someone finds the courage to ask for help, they are met not with a waitlist, but with a safe place to call home.

With urgency,  
Shannon McDonnell